

# Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles

**KARL OLAV SANDNES**

*The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, Oslo*



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## CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xiii</i>

### **Part 1 Prolegomena**

<b>1 Introduction, previous solutions, method and Pauline context</b>	<b>4</b>
1.0 Introduction	4
1.1 Bible translations	5
1.2 The scholarly debate	7
1.3 Methodological considerations	11
1.4 Belly and body – the Pauline context of the study	14

### **Part 2 The Graeco-Roman belly**

<b>2 The belly as a sign – ancient physiognomics</b>	<b>24</b>
2.0 Introduction	24
2.1 The stomach as a sign	27
2.2 Summary	34
<b>3 The belly in ancient moral philosophy</b>	<b>35</b>
3.0 Introduction	35
3.1 Euripides (born probably in the 480s BC)	37
3.2 Plato (c. 429–347 BC)	39
3.3 Xenophon (born around 430 BC)	42
3.4 Aristotle (384–322 BC)	45
3.5 Dio Chrysostom (AD c. 40/50–110)	46
3.6 Musonius Rufus (AD 30–AD 101/102)	47
3.7 Epictetus (mid first century to second century AD)	49
3.8 Plutarch (AD c. 50–c. 120)	52
3.9 Athenaeus (flourished c. AD 200)	54
3.10 Summary	57

<b>4</b>	<b>Ancient critique of Epicureanism</b>	<b>61</b>
4.0	Epicurus – the popularity and reputation of a doctrine	61
4.1	Cicero	65
4.2	Seneca	71
4.3	Plutarch	74
4.4	Summary	77
<b>5</b>	<b>Banquets – opportunities for the belly</b>	<b>79</b>
5.0	Introduction	79
5.1	Parties for pleasure	80
5.2	Seneca – the moral philosopher	83
5.3	Horace and Juvenal – two Roman satirists	86
5.4	Athenaeus and Alciphron	89
5.5	Summary	92
<b>Part 3 The appropriated belly</b>		
<b>6</b>	<b>The belly-<i>topos</i> in Jewish-Hellenistic sources</b>	<b>97</b>
6.1	Sir. 23:6	97
6.2	<i>T. Rub.</i> 2:1–3:8	97
6.3	3 Macc. 7:10–11	98
6.4	4 Maccabees	101
6.5	<i>Aristeas to Philocrates</i> 140–1	104
6.6	<i>T. Mos.</i> 7:2–4	105
6.7	<i>Cairo Geniza Wisdom</i>	106
<b>7</b>	<b>The belly in Philo’s writings</b>	<b>108</b>
7.0	Introduction	108
7.1	Anthropology	109
7.2	The ‘geography’ of the belly	112
7.3	The serpent crawling on its belly	113
7.4	Esau selling his birthright for the sake of his belly	117
7.5	Joseph and the servants of Pharaoh	121
7.6	Jewish customs as means of controlling the stomach	123
7.7	Fasts and Sabbaths	126
7.8	Food laws	128
7.9	Conversion – the safest way to rule the belly	130
7.10	Summary	131
<b>Part 4 Belly-worship and body according to Paul</b>		
<b>8</b>	<b>The lifestyle of citizens of the heavenly <i>politeuma</i> – Phil. 3:17–21</b>	<b>136</b>
8.0	Introduction	136

8.1	‘Stand firm’ and the rhetoric of examples	138
8.2	‘Whose god is the belly’	141
8.3	Opponents?	155
8.4	Belly-worship and body in Philipians	159
8.5	Summary	162
<b>9</b>	<b>‘Serving the belly’ as kinship with Satan – Rom. 16:17–20</b>	<b>165</b>
9.0	Introduction	165
9.1	Warning against deceivers	165
9.2	Worshipping the belly – Gen. 3:15, Satan and flattery	169
9.3	Why call the adversaries belly-worshippers?	172
9.4	‘Serving the belly’ and body in Romans	175
9.5	Summary	179
<b>10</b>	<b>The Corinthian belly</b>	<b>181</b>
10.0	Introduction	181
10.1	1 Cor. 15:32: Epicurean lifestyle versus faith in resurrection	181
10.2	1 Cor. 11:17–34: the Lord’s Supper or stuffing one’s own stomach?	187
10.3	1 Cor. 6:12–20: the Christian faith has implications for stomach and sex	191
10.4	1 Cor. 10:7 in context: the belly – a tempting force in Corinth as in the wilderness	199
10.5	Belly and body in 1 Corinthians	212
10.6	Summary	215
<b>Part 5</b>	<b>The earliest expositors of Paul</b>	
<b>11</b>	<b>The belly-dicta of Paul in Patristic literature</b>	<b>219</b>
11.1	Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215)	219
11.2	Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225)	223
11.3	Origen (c. 185–c. 254)	226
11.4	Cyprian (d. 258)	230
11.5	Novatian (d. 257–8)	232
11.6	Methodius of Olympus (d. c. 311)	234
11.7	Ambrosiaster (c. 300)	235
11.8	Pelagius (late fourth and early fifth centuries)	237
11.9	Jerome (c. 345–420)	238
11.10	John Chrysostom (c. 347–407)	244
11.11	Augustine of Hippo (354–430)	252
11.12	Severian of Gabala (fl. c. 400)	256
11.13	Tyrannius Rufinus (c. 345–411)	256
11.14	Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428)	256

11.15	Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 460)	258
11.16	Peter Chrysologus (c. 400–50)	259
11.17	Gennadius of Marseilles (fl. 470)	259
11.18	Antiochus, the Patriarch of Antioch (d. 598)	260
11.19	John Climacus (c. 570–c. 649)	261
11.20	Summary	261
<b>Part 6</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Concluding remarks</b>	<b>265</b>
12.1	Paul's critique of belly-worship in an ancient setting	265
12.2	Belly-worship and body in Paul's letters	269
	<i>Bibliography</i>	275
	<i>Works of reference</i>	275
	<i>Sources</i>	276
	<i>Secondary literature</i>	278
	<i>Index of modern authors</i>	292
	<i>Index of Graeco-Roman sources</i>	295
	<i>Index of Old Testament, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha</i> <i>and other Jewish writings</i>	303
	<i>Index of New Testament and early Christian writings</i>	311

# 1

## INTRODUCTION, PREVIOUS SOLUTIONS, METHOD AND PAULINE CONTEXT

### 1.0 Introduction

The commonest terms for stomach in ancient writings (κοιλία and γαστήρ)<sup>1</sup> occur in the following texts in the undisputed Pauline epistles: 1 Thess. 5:13; Gal. 1:15; Phil. 3:19; 1 Cor. 6:13; Rom. 16:18. The first instance refers to pregnancy. Gal. 1:15 is a related text. Κοιλία means ‘womb’, and refers to the point where life begins according to Biblical thought (cf. Jer. 1:15; *Jub.* 21:8; *Lib. Ant.* 9:2.5; 22:3). Paul’s reference to his mother’s womb is embedded in a *topos* of vocation, aimed at justifying his divine call.<sup>2</sup> A rather different meaning appears in Paul’s dicta on the stomach-devotees in Phil. 3:19: ‘Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things’ and Rom. 16:18: ‘For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites . . .’ In the last instance, *NRSV* renders κοιλία as ‘appetite’. The two references are either polemical or a warning against people who are devoted to their belly. In other words, they belong to a different rhetoric. This study claims that they are similar to the Greek saying of Tit. 1:12, about the Cretans whose entire personality is their stomachs.

It is the aim of the present study to substantiate there being a rhetoric of the belly in Paul’s letters, and also to see how it works. Since for obvious reasons 1 Cor. 6:13 has nothing to do with either pregnancy or vocation, it will be investigated as part of Paul’s rhetoric of the belly. Belly-servitude, or having the belly as god, seems on an intuitive reading to be related to gluttony and greed, appetite or selfishness. A spontaneous reading will always be subject to discussion. I here refer to what most of my friends, relatives and colleagues were thinking of when I mentioned the topic of belly-devotion to them.

<sup>1</sup> For other terms, see chap. 3.0.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Olav Sandnes, *Paul – One of the Prophets?* and Roy E. Ciampa, *Galatians*, pp. 111–14; 332–3.

But this spontaneous reading is far from confirmed in the scholarly literature. There is no consensus either on what Paul is thinking of when he mentions ‘belly-worship’ nor about the historical reference of his terminology. Gordon D. Fee says that ‘all in all, we must again beg a degree of ignorance in this matter’.<sup>3</sup> So saying is a true act of honesty. On the other hand, a scholarly admission of ignorance triggers curiosity, and thus represents a challenge. This study is the result of this curiosity.

In Phil. 3:19 and Rom. 16:18, the references to the belly are synonymous with living a life contrary to the gospel. Some people act and live as though they were driven by their bellies.<sup>4</sup> The stomach is the driving force or higher power in their life. But what does this actually mean, and why does Paul describe a lifestyle opposed to Christian behaviour in this way? How would his addressees understand this? What is the proper background for an adequate reading of the texts? The aim of this study is to answer these and related questions, and thus to elucidate the meaning and reference of the belly-texts. A major task will be to see how these dicta work within the literary and theological setting of Paul’s letters.

An investigation into Paul’s belly-dicta might to some appear as narrow and limited; after all Paul does not speak frequently about the stomach. If, however, the relevant texts are placed within the broader framework of how Paul conceived of the human body, the belly-texts will gain in interest. It is the conviction of the present writer that the belly-dicta are not simply rhetorical devices aimed at vilifying opponents. They are significant sources for how Paul instructed his recent converts, and attest his thought about bodily needs. This conviction roots belly-worship firmly in Pauline theology as well as in ancient moral exhortation. To argue this is the aim of this study.

## 1.1 Bible translations

Since Paul’s references to the belly are often seen as marginal, mere rhetoric or random phenomena in his letters, they have not been at the centre of the Pauline debate. An in-depth monograph on the topic is still to be written. This is, of course, not to say that scholars have not grappled with

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, p. 372; similarly in Markus Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, p. 231 and Barclay M. Newman, Eugene A. Nida, *Romans*, p. 296; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 803.

<sup>4</sup> It is surprising that Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Körpersymbolik*, mention neither Rom. 16:18 nor Phil. 3:19. Anthony Byatt, *Metaphors*, has a chapter on the human body and clothing (chap. 6), but the stomach is left unmentioned. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul*, pays attention to various parts of the body, but leaves out the stomach; see e.g. his index of topics p. 261 s.v. ‘body’.



these texts. Relevant material is found in commentaries, related articles as well as dictionaries; not to mention Bible translations. However, in the light of the vast literature on most New Testament topics, the two stomach-dicta of Paul represent a neglected field of study. The aim of this section is to point out the diverse opinions about Paul's aims in warning his readers not to be servants of the stomach. This will, hopefully, prove the necessity of an investigation into this problem and these texts. I here restrict myself to mapping the terrain. The real involvement and argument will take place in the exegetical chapters themselves. We start with some examples from the Bible translations.

*NEB 1961*

Phil. 3:19: 'They are heading for destruction, appetite is their god'

Rom. 16:18: 'Avoid them, for such people are servants not of Christ our Lord, but of their own appetites'

*The New Jerusalem Bible 1985*

Phil. 3:19: 'They are destined to be lost; their god is the stomach'<sup>5</sup>

Rom. 16:18: 'People of that sort are servants not of our Lord Christ, but of their greed'

*The Holy Bible Knox Version*

Phil. 3:19: 'Perdition is the end that awaits them, their hungry bellies are the god they worship'

Rom. 16:18: 'Such men are not servants of Christ our Lord; their hungry bellies are their masters'

*The New American Bible*

Phil. 3:19: 'Such as these will end in disaster. Their god is their belly'

Rom. 16:18: 'Such men serve, not Christ our Lord, but their own bellies'

*The Amplified Bible*

Phil. 3:19: 'They are doomed and their fate is eternal misery [perdition]; their god is their stomach [their appetites, their sensuality]'

Rom. 16:18: 'For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites and base desires'

<sup>5</sup> In a footnote this translation says that 'the dietary laws loomed large in the Jewish practice of religion'.

This list of Bible translations is limited to the particular part of the verses where *κοιλία* appears. Our investigation will, of course, have to deal with the texts in context. The translations exhibit uncertainty on how to render these texts; in particular this is evident in the instances where the translations are accompanied by notes and even parentheses. The uncertainty on how to translate *κοιλία* in these texts is seen, for instance, in Hans Conzelmann's commentary on 1 Corinthians. He says it refers to the 'organ of digestion, or – probably – of sex'.<sup>6</sup> This is typical of the situation among scholars and Bible translators.

## 1.2 The scholarly debate

The uncertainty which is visible in the Bible translations is carried over into the scholarly debate as well, or *vice versa*. Even if we are talking about two Pauline passages, Phil. 3:19 and Rom. 16:18, it is justified – at this stage in our presentation – to look at the two together. Although we see them together here, it remains necessary in the exegetical part to treat them separately, since it is the aim of this study to elicit how Paul makes use of a common idiom in a particular literary and theological context. For the time being, it is, however, helpful to give an account of different views held on the two texts. This presentation is accompanied by some comments which lead to the next section on methodological considerations.

### Observance of Jewish dietary laws

The references to the belly are very concrete; they address the question of Jewish food laws. Paul says that believers who continue to observe the dietary laws are devoted to their bellies. Probably he has in mind Jewish-Christian opponents. According to Helmut Koester, the people under attack are 'Law-perfectionists of Jewish origin'.<sup>7</sup> Paul is attacking 'Torah-centric Jewish Christians' in a way which resembles the Galatian conflict.<sup>8</sup> This view is often supported by reference to commentators of

<sup>6</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *Corinthians*, p. 110 n. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Helmut Koester, 'Polemic', p. 326.

<sup>8</sup> See also Ben Witherington III, *Friendship*, p. 29: '... a euphemistic way to refer to the fact that the opponents are ruled by and tout Jewish food laws and a concern for circumcision (see Phil. 3:2–3) (cf. pp. 89–90)'. Similarly Johannes Behm, '*κοιλία*', p. 788; Karl P. Donfried, I. Howard Marshall, *Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters*, p. 124. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, p. 166. Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon* Vol. 2, p. 292 says on Rom. 16:18 that 'it is also possible that *koilia* in Rom. 16:18 refers to Jewish dietary laws and regulations'.

the ancient church who supposedly, in general, took the phrase as a piece of polemic against food laws.<sup>9</sup>

### *Comments*

The phrases ‘serving the belly’ or ‘having the stomach as god’ are interpreted primarily on the basis of Pauline polemics against Judaizers. The phrase itself is not given the attention it deserves. Extra-Pauline analogies are therefore of minor interest to these scholars. Furthermore, we need to ask to what extent the predicate of ‘having the belly as god’, or ‘serving the stomach’ are to be taken as a descriptive of the opponents. Is it likely that Paul would denounce the Jewish food laws in this strong way, equating them with idolatry?

### Flesh

In these texts ‘the stomach’ is a circuitous way of referring to ‘the flesh’. Phil. 3 and Rom. 16 are two related examples of a lifestyle associated with ‘flesh’. According to Moisés Silva ‘... this term is a strong expression roughly equivalent to *sarx* (flesh). If so, the reference is not to a specific kind of misconduct – whether licentiousness or legalism – but to a frame of mind that is opposed to the *pneuma* (Spirit) and that may manifest itself in a variety of ways’.<sup>10</sup> Gal. 5:19–21 lists the works of the flesh, among which are sexual immorality, jealousy, drunkenness etc. Belly-worship belongs within this framework of Pauline theology.<sup>11</sup>

### *Comments*

Interpreting the belly-phrases in the light of the role played by the flesh in Paul’s theology is certainly relevant, and there is a lot to recommend this perspective, but this view is none the less unable to catch all the cultural associations with which these dicta are so replete. The rhetorical strategy of Romans may be related to the contrast Spirit versus flesh in Galatians. But this contrast is not very prominent in the strategy of Philippians. Since analogous references are found in ancient literature, Paul’s texts

<sup>9</sup> References in Johannes Behm, ‘κοιλία’, p. 788 n. 14. This will be discussed separately in chap. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, p. 210. For Phil. 3:19, see Joachim Gnilka, *Philippenerbrief*, pp. 205–6; Peter O’Brien, *Philippians*, p. 456; Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, p. 144. For Romans 16:18, see Ernst Käsemann, *Römer*, p. 398; Heinrich Schlier, *Römerbrief*, p. 448; C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* Vol. 2, p. 800; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, p. 903.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, p. 372 takes ‘stomach’ in Phil. 3 to refer to ‘bodily desires of all kind’, which brings him close to this category of interpretation although on p. 371 n. 36 he says that the flesh-interpretation ‘lacks linguistic and textual support’.

should be seen in the light of that material. This gives the belly-phrases a different ring. Understanding these terms only in the light of Paul's theology runs the risk of losing the allusive element in his language. We can only be alerted to the allusiveness of Paul's language if we see the texts in the light of the broader material available in antiquity. It is my conviction that Paul's texts on the belly communicate on a wider basis, which is not sufficiently described by mere reference to his own theology.

### Sex or genitals

The stomach is a euphemism for the sexual organ, similar to the use of σκεῦος in 1 Thess. 4:4.<sup>12</sup> This view has been advocated in a special way by Chris Mearns. He says that 'both κοιλία and αἰσχύνη are euphemisms for the circumcised male organ',<sup>13</sup> and as such a hostile reference to circumcision. Mearns' interpretation is thus not far from the food laws interpretation mentioned above. He considers Gal. 6:12–17, about those who 'look good in the flesh', to be the closest parallel to both Phil. 3 and Rom. 16. The belly may, therefore, be replaced by the flesh and more especially circumcision. Mearns holds that this meaning of κοιλία is widely attested in the LXX.<sup>14</sup>

### Comments

Here the rhetorical function of κοιλία is dismissed. In Paul's two relevant texts, the stomach belongs to a polemical rhetorical strategy. Furthermore, the LXX references are entirely different in nature. As rightly pointed out by Gordon D. Fee,<sup>15</sup> the Old Testament material refers to 'the fruit of the loins'. In 2 Sam 7:12 LXX, κοιλία is connected to the family. In 2 Sam 16:11 LXX, it refers to David's son, who has come forth from his own κοιλία; his life or loins. In other words, the Old Testament texts invoked by Mearns belong within the rhetoric of 'where life begins', and are irrelevant to the Pauline texts in question. Mearns may, however, still be right in bringing sexual aspects into the picture, although this has to be done on different terms.

### Gluttony or greed

In Paul's references to serving or worshipping the belly, stomach is a metonym for unbridled sensuality, with the emphasis on gluttony or

<sup>12</sup> For σκεῦος as the male organ, see Torleiv Elgvin, 'Vessel'.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Mearns, 'Opponents at Philippi', p. 198.      <sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 198–200.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, p. 371 n. 36.

greed.<sup>16</sup> This is certainly the most straightforward reading of these texts, but even so, this interpretation can be supported in various ways. It can be substantiated by means of similar expressions in ancient Graeco-Roman material, or it can be seen as a typically Jewish idiom.<sup>17</sup>

### *Comments*

Compared with the other interpretations, this derives strength from being so uncomplicated. It concurs with a major concern in the Pauline literature; but is that sufficient fully to explain the rhetoric of the texts in question? The question of a Graeco-Roman background or a Jewish idiom is very much the same as how Paul's addressees perceived these short remarks of the apostle. Finding the proper background is crucial, owing to the brevity of Paul's belly-dicta. These are so brief that we must depend on analogical expressions in interpreting them. This investigation will argue that the Graeco-Roman material is of the utmost importance.

### Avoiding martyrdom

According to Ernst Lohmeyer, Paul's Epistle to the Philippians prepares his addressees for martyrdom. When he urges them to imitate himself, this involves willingness to face death. Phil. 3:17–18 speaks of a contrast with respect to the cross of Jesus Christ; hence both verses speak in terms of walking. The martyrs and those prepared for martyrdom have taken upon themselves the cross, while the belly-devotees seek to escape it. They therefore have their belly as their god.<sup>18</sup> Lohmeyer says that Phil. 3:19 refers to those who seek to escape martyrdom, since they are also called 'enemies of the cross'.

### *Comments*

Lohmeyer's thesis does not relate to the term *κοιλία* as such, but he sees the term as a metaphor for a selfish life, governed by the wish to safeguard oneself above anything else. Although Lohmeyer is not in touch with the term itself, nor its cultural allusiveness, he may still be not far from the rhetorical strategy in which the term is embedded in

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Martin Dibelius, *Philippianer*, p. 71; Robert Jewett, 'Conflicting Movements', pp. 379–82.

<sup>17</sup> This is claimed by Brian Rosner, who has kindly given me a copy of his presentation of the two relevant Pauline texts in his forthcoming study on greed in the New Testament.

<sup>18</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer, *Philippianer*, pp. 152–6.

Philippians. His interpretation raises the question to what extent the stomach has become a metaphor. But what, then, is it a metaphor for?

This survey of previous research demonstrates that attempts have been made to place the belly-dicta within a context of wider Pauline themes, such as his opposition to Jewish dietary laws or circumcision, his theology of the flesh, his concept of imitating Christ in terms of suffering. In this way the contributions have taken some important steps towards rooting belly-worship in Paul's theology. The problem is, however, that although belly-worship needs to be seen in a wider Pauline perspective, it cannot be seen merely in a Pauline context. This misses the aspects of contemporary culture which, in my view, are inherent in what he says about belly-worship. This investigation will demonstrate that Paul did not coin this phrase; he made use of a commonly held view on the stomach. To elucidate that background is, therefore, necessary to seeing how it enters his own theology. The cultural background inherent in major Pauline themes has been neglected by scholars. I therefore consider it vital to understand this background in order to place it correctly in Paul's theology on the body.

It is the thesis of this study that Paul is using a traditional idiom, a *topos* or a literary commonplace attested in ancient Graeco-Roman sources, and appropriated in Jewish sources as well. It is wise to make an independent investigation of this before moving into how the idiom of 'serving the belly' works in Paul's letters; otherwise we will easily miss in what way his remarks on the belly made sense to his ancient readers. Paul draws heavily on concepts that were firmly established in the Graeco-Roman world. To substantiate this is the task of Part 2 in this study.

### **1.3 Methodological considerations**

Paul's few references on belly-worship are in brief and coded language. It is, therefore, difficult to extract meaning directly from them. The brevity of his language makes them more difficult to interpret. The scarcity of information in the texts themselves, is, of course, the reason that they appear so enigmatic to the scholars. The only way to overcome this, is to view the Pauline texts in the light of contemporary texts providing similar dicta. In the scholarly literature some references from ancient texts are mentioned, usually contained in parentheses in most commentaries. These are, however, not elaborated on, nor is the extensiveness of this material worked out. Thus, rooting Paul's texts in Graeco-Roman material is nothing new. The new thing is to do this in a more determined and elaborated way than

before. This justifies the relatively extensive presentation of background material in this study.

Since Paul is not alone in antiquity in speaking of the stomach in a negative way, we must therefore ask to what the belly refers elsewhere. Are we dealing with a kind of *topos*, a common way of describing a certain lifestyle and attitude? Abraham J. Malherbe defines *topoi* as subjects appearing with some regularity.<sup>19</sup> This may refer to subjects of common interest and treatment, such as *περὶ οἰκονομίας* or *περὶ φιλίας*, proverbs or maxims,<sup>20</sup> short teachings as well as common examples and figures of speech.<sup>21</sup> It is the conviction of the present writer that 'having the stomach as god' belongs within the category of commonplaces in antiquity. To substantiate this is, of course, the aim of Part 2 in this study.

What is the benefit or use of labelling Paul's belly-sayings a *topos*? In the words of Malherbe:

This approach, which moves beyond the listing of 'parallels', and uses *topoi* to construct a real world in which people lived, points in the direction of future research . . . The elimination or modification by the New Testament writers of standard parts of a *topos* would be especially significant.<sup>22</sup>

Paul embarks on a communication with his readers; a dialogue with silent elements – especially to us who are not familiar with the culture in which such commonplaces worked. Looking for analogous sayings in the ancient sources enables us to see how Paul's contemporaries might have read his belly-dicta; we need to define the knowledge of the *topos* which may exist among his addressees. This gives us access to what sense Paul's dicta made to his readers. Seeing 'having the belly as god' as a *topos* brings to our awareness the communicative competence of Paul's ancient readers. To a modern reader the stomach or the belly may give a different set of ideas. Investigation of the ancient material will provide historical guidance for understanding the belly-dicta.

The investigation will then proceed to study how this material has been appropriated in a Jewish setting. Emphasis is given to Philo as well as 3 and 4 Maccabees. By giving the Alexandrian Jew, Philo, a prominent place in our discussion we hope to bridge the gap between the

<sup>19</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, 'Hellenistic Moralists', pp. 320–5.

<sup>20</sup> For example 'having all things in common'; see Karl Olav Sandnes, *A New Family*, pp. 139–41.

<sup>21</sup> For example the philosopher as a physician; see Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation*, pp. 26, 43–4, 49, 52, 64, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, 'Hellenistic Moralists', p. 325.

Graeco-Roman material and Paul; for in Philo the Graeco-Roman material on the stomach has undergone a biblical filtering. Philo provides a lot of relevant material, but this has hardly been noticed. Thus we are paving the way for a new reading of the relevant Pauline passages. Finally, our exegesis of the Pauline texts will be tested by turning to the early interpreters of these texts; i.e. the Patristic evidence will be investigated to see how the belly-phrases were perceived in generations that were close to Paul both in time and culture. This is necessary since Patristic literature has played a significant role in shaping the debate on the two Pauline texts in question, particularly among advocates of the food law interpretation (see 1.2).

It would, however, be illegitimate to transfer all possible meanings or potential inherent in the *topos* to any text; i.e. to the relevant Pauline texts. James Barr has coined the term ‘illegitimate totality transfer’, which he defines as ‘the error that arises, when the “meaning” of a word (understood as the total series of relations in which it is used in the literature) is read into a particular case’.<sup>23</sup> The warning issued by Barr is relevant indeed to this study. The material on the belly found in ancient sources cannot be transferred all at once and without further ado to the Pauline passages. Emphasis has to be given to how Paul modifies the *topos*; how it is moulded into his theology and instruction.

The Pauline texts to be investigated are, of course, Phil. 3:19 and Rom. 16:18 in their immediate contexts. These are the two instances where Paul addresses those whose belly is their god, or those who have committed themselves to the stomach. To be added are, however, some related texts, such as 1 Cor. 6:13: ‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.’ This enigmatic verse is usually seen as a Corinthian slogan; therefore many translations render the verse as a quotation – as does the *NRSV*, which is quoted here. Paul’s quotations from the Old Testament in 1 Cor. 10:7 (‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play’) as well as in 1 Cor. 15:32 (‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’) may also have some bearing on our topic. The interpretation of the two belly-dicta in Paul’s letters as well as the background material provided in this investigation suggests a renewed look at these Corinthian texts.

Since worshipping the belly is obviously negative to Paul, the impression arises that he is referring to opponents. The scholarly literature fully demonstrates that these texts have been seen as part of a polemic in which Paul is targeting his opponents. No doubt there is a lot to

<sup>23</sup> James Barr, *Semantics*, p. 218.



recommend such a conclusion. Paul might be blackening opponents, but he is surely making more out of these dicta than mere polemics. The belly-references enter his own instruction, and thus become not only part of a rhetorical strategy, but a theological conviction as well. By speaking of a rhetorical strategy in which Paul's belly-dicta are embedded, our study focuses on how this maxim is used in its literary setting; i.e. focus is rather on pragmatic textual observations than on gleaning information about opponents.<sup>24</sup> Having done so, we proceed to the question of how the references to belly-worship work within Pauline theology.

This contradicts a commonly held view, namely that accusing opponents of moral depravity was a rhetorical device to undermine their authority. It was nothing but a 'stereotyped technique of vilification'.<sup>25</sup> Scholars arguing this case are certainly right in pointing out that the rhetoric of vilification is by no means an objective description of opponents. But they still assume the presence of opponents, and read Paul's text as mirroring a conflict with opponents. Their emphasis on opponents easily leads them to dismiss the way Paul is deploying this rhetoric. This study argues that the rhetoric of the belly has entered his own instruction and forms a significant component of his conception of proper Christian lifestyle. It becomes a building block of his theology, albeit a small one. If focus is on Paul rather than his assumed opponents, the interpretation of this rhetoric has to move beyond the point of labelling it a technique of moral derogation.

#### **1.4 Belly and body – the Pauline context of the study**

It is the conviction of the present investigation that, although belly-worship in Paul's letters is rightly seen as a commonplace of ancient moral philosophy, sometimes even as rhetoric with which to vilify opponents, it is still deeply embedded in his theology of the human body. We will now give some thought, therefore, to how Paul conceived of the believer's body. This is hardly a topic *per se* in his letters, but his basic convictions can still be gleaned from his epistles. What he says about the stomach works within a set of presuppositions about the body. Our investigation into the belly-dicta will proceed letter by letter. In order to provide a Pauline context for the investigation, the study of the individual belly-texts will be followed by attempts to sketch a body-theology in

<sup>24</sup> A warning not to take polemic in antiquity at face value has been issued by Luke T. Johnson, 'Conventions of Ancient Polemic'.

<sup>25</sup> Andrie du Toit, 'Vilification', pp. 408–9; Lauri Thurén, 'Hey Jude!', pp. 457–9.

these letters individually, within which the references to the belly are at home. The present introductory presentation of Paul's body-theology is, however, of a general kind, thus providing a Pauline context or framework for the investigation. In this presentation I limit myself to the letters whose authenticity is not disputed.

As a Jew and former Pharisee, Paul was certainly not indifferent to bodily questions. His Jewish heritage, with its focus on clean and unclean, the purity laws, implied a strong concern for bodily boundaries. This concern was, of course, strengthened by circumcision and dietary laws, both of which were intimately connected to how Jewish traditions conceived of the human body. Since these regulations were also markers of Jewish identity *vis-à-vis* Gentiles,<sup>26</sup> the body was equally a sign of identity. In his theology, Paul is very much concerned with reassessing these bodily signs, to the extent of abandoning them. Thus his view on the body becomes a matter of significance, since it developed from the very heart of his theology; i.e. how to define the identity of Christian believers.<sup>27</sup> Paul's concern for the holiness of the body of believers can be discerned from his first letter and throughout: 'May the God of peace himself sanctify (ἀγιάσαι) you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless (τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἄμειπτως) at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. 5:23, cf. 3:13).

Paul had received disturbing news about his recent converts in Corinth. The reports described a rejection of traditional moral discipline that expressed itself in illicit sexual practices (1 Cor. 5–6), in participation in temple meals (1 Cor. 8 and 10), in discrimination at the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 11), and in questioning the belief in a future resurrection (1 Cor. 15). These issues all raised the question of how Christian faith affected bodily practices. In this situation, therefore, Paul's argument centres around the question of the body for the first time, as well as most extensively, in his letters.<sup>28</sup> Paul not only portrays the Corinthian church as God's temple, but makes the believers individually the dwelling of His Spirit. They are the temple of God since His Spirit dwells in them; i.e. in their σῶμα (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19–20; 2 Cor. 6:16, cf. Rom. 8:29). Paul thereby puts the emphasis on their unity, the lordship of God as well as their holiness; by implication the believers are urged to avoid practices which can destroy

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. James D. G. Dunn, 'New Perspective'.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, pp. 45–6 similarly starts his presentation of Paul's view on the body with his grappling with the question of how to define God's people.

<sup>28</sup> Thus Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, pp. 254–5. See also chap. 10.5 of this study.

the temple of God.<sup>29</sup> Destroying God's holy dwelling implies the danger of polluting the sacred. This pollution takes place through the lifestyle in which Corinthian believers participated. Since Paul feared pollution, he was concerned about maintaining the boundaries of his converts. He urges them to keep away from Christian brothers who commit *porneia*, incest or other vices characteristic of their pagan past (1 Cor. 5:1–13, cf. 2 Cor. 6:14–16).

Furthermore, the notion of the body as a temple brings to mind sacrifices, which in Paul's case means a worship which involves σῶμα, i.e. '... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἀγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν)' (Rom. 12:1). Although Paul here extends the meaning of sacrifice in a figurative way, his reference to σῶμα is unmistakable: bodies are to be sacrificed; the body with all its practices is to be dedicated to God on a daily basis. As an offering to God, the believer's body is placed entirely under God's control and at his disposal, 'so that it could no longer be used for normal purposes'.<sup>30</sup> Conceiving of the body in sacrificial terms implies that it will be used up in service, just as offerings are consumed in the temples. Many scholars claim that in Rom. 12:1, as well as in related texts such as Phil. 1:20, σῶμα denotes the whole being of Paul, not a part of him; it is thus a simple anthropological term.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation can surely be supported by reference to Paul's emphasis on a total commitment, but it nevertheless tends to neglect the physical involvement in Paul's sayings on σῶμα.<sup>32</sup> Paul has in mind the bodily consequences of faith, i.e. the physical embodiment of the true worship mentioned in Rom. 12:1–2. This is suggested by his distinction between body and mind.<sup>33</sup> The apostle often refers to the deterioration of his body due to the sufferings which his ministry brings upon him (2 Cor. 4:7–12; Phil. 2:17).

<sup>29</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, p. 420: 'Paul perhaps chooses the verb (οἰκέω) here to mark off the lordship which should characterize the Christian.'

<sup>30</sup> Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, p. 301; cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, pp. 543–8.

<sup>31</sup> This has been argued by e.g. Eduard Schweizer, 'σῶμα', pp. 1065–6; Rudolph Bultmann, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 192–203; also recently Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, pp. 750–1. In his critical assessment of this holistic interpretation, Robert H. Gundry, *Sôma*, pp. 3–8 describes the scholarly debate: '... it has become orthodoxy among NT theologians to say that in Pauline literature, and perhaps elsewhere as well, *sôma* frequently and characteristically refers to the whole person rather than especially, or exclusively, to the body' (p. 5).

<sup>32</sup> This has been forcefully argued by Robert H. Gundry, *Sôma*; see also T. J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality*, p. 98.

<sup>33</sup> Thus also Robert H. Gundry, *Sôma*, pp. 34–6.

‘Paul brings here [in Rom. 12:1] to a climax that peculiar insistence upon the somatic character of redemption in Rom. 6–8’,<sup>34</sup> to which we will return soon.

Paul’s view on the body is closely connected with the major pattern of transition in his theology: before versus now or after (Gal. 1:23; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; cf. Eph. 2:11–13).<sup>35</sup> The believers have turned their backs to their pagan past. Their former life Paul characterizes in the list of vices; e.g. 1 Cor. 6:9–11 where emphasis is given to illicit sexual activities, idolatry, greed, and other misdeeds. These sins are all mentioned in texts structured according to the pattern of past–now; such was their former life, such are they now. Paul’s instructions in 1 Thess. 4:3–8 are for example dependent upon the transition which has taken place in the life of the believers. This transition has bodily consequences; emphasis is given to questions of sex. Believers have a lifestyle separating them from their pagan past. Their sanctification is to the forefront here; they have been set apart from the Gentiles, and a relapse into that past lifestyle pollutes their holiness. Hence, Paul is concerned about their purity, which implies boundaries in terms of a lifestyle setting them apart from paganism.<sup>36</sup> Believers who do not accept these boundaries bring, as we saw, defilement and pollution upon themselves and the Christian fellowship, but furthermore, they confuse their identity.

In Rom. 1:18–32 bodily sins are seen as examples of the idolatry that characterizes pagan life. Pagans exchange God the Maker for his creatures. From this develop various idolatrous ways of living in which the body is dishonoured. Thus the body can be involved in idolatry. A keyword is the bodily ἐπιθυμία which here has an obvious negative sense (Rom. 1:24, cf. 1.27); it refers to the desire for something forbidden, and is closely associated with the flesh (σάρξ).<sup>37</sup> The former life of his converts Paul can describe as κατὰ σάρκα (Rom. 8:4–5; 2 Cor. 10:2, cf. Gal. 6:7–8) which in Gal. 5:16–21 appears as enslavement to vices, among which a number can be associated with desires deriving from the belly.<sup>38</sup> Pagans and Christians can thus, according to Paul, be distinguished by

<sup>34</sup> Robert Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*, p. 302.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Philo on conversion; chap. 7.9 in this study; Eph. 2:3; 4:22; Tit. 3:3 in which passions and the uncontrolled desires of the body are something which the believers have left behind. Worth mentioning is here also Rom. 7:24 where Paul speaks of redemption from τὸ σῶμα τοῦ θανάτου as opposed to Rom. 12:1 where σῶμα has become the centre of Christian worship.

<sup>36</sup> This is emphasised by Dale B. Martin, *Corinthian Body*, see e.g. pp. 163–4, 168–71, 197.

<sup>37</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, pp. 120–1.

<sup>38</sup> This will be substantiated fully throughout this study.

their attitudes to their bodies. This has to do with the fundamental distinction in his theology between Flesh and Spirit. Dale B. Martin calls it Paul's apocalyptic dualism.<sup>39</sup> Paul's thoughts about the human body derive from the concept of the flesh as constantly waging war against the divinely given Spirit, which means the believers' participation in Christ's glorified body. The believers have passed from the enslavement of sin and the desires of the body to obedience and righteousness:

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under the law, but under grace. (Rom. 6:12–14)

Baptism releases from any obligation to the flesh (cf. Rom. 8:12). These texts from Romans address the question of the body from the perspective of 'who is in control'. This is clearly seen in the verbs applied here: βασιλεύειν, υπακούειν, κυριεύειν, υπό . . . εἶναι, ὀφειλήτης εἶναι. Obviously, to Paul the body with its members was in need of control; it was either ministering to righteousness or obeying the desires. What Paul here says about the body is entirely dependent upon his distinction between law and grace. In Romans this implies that Paul is not preoccupied with the flesh solely as the source of desire or evil sensuality; the logic of Rom. 6 is directed at Jewish piety as well, in which the body is offered hope if maintained in accordance with customs laid down in the Law. But the Law has, according to Paul, no power over the passions deriving from the body (cf. Rom. 8:3). The power of desires surpasses that of the Law. Hence, the Law and commandments cannot fight the bodily desires. Although the Law points out what desire is, it is unable to change the fact that ἐπιθυμία is a fundamental aspect of human life.<sup>40</sup> Sin has taken advantage of the Law and produces desires in all human beings. Such is Paul's argument in Rom. 7:5, 7–13, which also brings to mind the human condition of despair in Rom. 1:18–3:20. This situation in which the human body finds itself is, therefore, not adequately dealt with by merely calling for control and self-mastery. To Paul passions and mastery are only dealt with by being crucified with Christ; this is what Rom. 6 is all about. Christ

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. Dale B. Martin, *Corinthian Body*, e.g. pp. 172, 176.

<sup>40</sup> This is vividly depicted in Rom. 7:14–25; see Stanley K. Stowers, *Romans*, pp. 260–4; Karl Olav Sandnes, *Tidens Fylde*, pp. 196–7.

is not an example of self-mastery to the believers; they can only master their bodies thanks to their participation in his death and resurrection.<sup>41</sup> The same logic is found in Gal. 5:24. ‘And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its παθήμασιν and ἐπιθυμίαις.’

In Rom. 13:11–14, however, the flesh appears in a *paraenetic* section. The flesh belongs to the deeds of darkness, which are exemplified in terms of revelling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarrelling, and jealousy (v. 13). These are terms which Paul elsewhere refers to the pagan past of his readers; but here he still considers it possible for believers to be committed to the flesh: ‘... and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιεῖσθε εἰς ἐπιθυμίας)’ (v. 14). Christians risk caring for the body in a way which arouses fleshly desires. The body can be treated as both a brothel and a temple. This is the reason why mastery of passions was still of relevance to Christians. According to Gal. 5:16–17, the spiritual life involves opposition to the desires of the flesh; the believer is caught in a continuous struggle between Flesh and Spirit. Paul was aware that his gospel, with its abandonment of physical circumcision as well as the purity laws, could be seen as inviting desires. He therefore warns against using the freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence (εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῇ σαρκί) (Gal. 5:13). In a situation which aroused ἐπιθυμίαι of various kinds (1 Cor. 8–10),<sup>42</sup> Paul speaks of himself as an example worthy of imitation (1 Cor. 9:24–7; 11:1). His ministry is depicted in terms of athletes, a well-known model of self-control.<sup>43</sup> When his example is applied to the questions of desire which Paul addresses in 1 Cor. 8–10, it becomes an example of fighting desires related to eating; i.e. participation at meals in the temple, eating food purchased in the market, and accepting invitations: ‘I punish my body and enslave it (ὕπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ)’ (1 Cor. 9:27).<sup>44</sup>

The body was located at the centre of Paul’s thoughts about the future. In Rom. 8 he describes how the entire creation is longing for freedom, which implies longing for ‘the redemption of our bodies (ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν)’ (Rom. 8:21–23).<sup>45</sup> This hope for the body will one day come true; the indwelling of the Spirit guarantees this (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The indwelling Spirit meant a participation in the body of Christ. This is the bottom line in Paul’s argument in 1 Cor. 6:12–20: ‘The man’s body is therefore an appendage of Christ’s body’.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> So also Stanley K. Stowers, *Romans*, pp. 255–8. <sup>42</sup> See later in this study.

<sup>43</sup> More on this later in this study. <sup>44</sup> More on this in chap. 10.4 of this study.

<sup>45</sup> For a recent discussion of this passage, see J. Ramsey Michaels, ‘Redemption of Our Body’.

<sup>46</sup> Dale B. Martin, *Corinthian Body*, p. 176.

The believers share in the Spirit which is characteristic of Christ's resurrected body: 'If the Spirit of him who raises Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you' (Rom. 8:11). This is Paul's apocalyptic dualism. The Christian body is in a transition, a process of being conformed to Christ's glorious body: 'He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself' (Phil. 3:21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:49; Rom. 6:5; 8:29). It is probably worth noting that this verse is found in the immediate context of Paul's most obvious dictum about belly-worship. Furthermore, the immediate context speaks also of sharing Christ's suffering and thus becoming like him in his death, as well as sharing in his resurrection (Phil. 3:10–11).

Paul speaks of this process in terms of a transformation so as to become fully like Christ's glorious body. This transformation is already under way in terms of an inner renewal and outward decay (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16; Gal. 4:19; Rom. 12:2). Paul addresses this most directly in 2 Cor. 4:16–5:5.<sup>47</sup> The inner renewal represents the first step towards being transformed into the resurrection body. The body shares in the glorious body of Christ, but this implies a decay of the body as well, i.e. experiences of suffering and impending death (e.g. 2 Cor. 4:10–11, 16–17; Rom. 8:10–13 and Phil. 3:10). Sharing in Christ's glorious body cannot be separated from sharing in his sufferings. The decay of the body in terms of suffering was to Paul a necessary preparation for the future glorious body. His own experiences due to his apostolic ministry were a constant reminder of this. He considered his apostolic sufferings applicable to all believers: 'For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his' (Rom. 6:5). Although in Rom. 6 Paul does not mention suffering as such, since death with Christ here primarily applies to the power of sin, there can hardly be any doubt that he considered being crucified with Christ a reference to daily experiences of agony, suffering, and opposition. This is implied in his emphasis on taking Christ as an example (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 2:4–11). Crucifixion and death thus marked continuous bodily experiences to the believers in their process of being transformed. Inner renewal and outward decay of the body were thus two sides of being united with Christ.

The apocalyptic dualism in Paul's body-theology implies that a process of heavenly origin is making its way through the earthly body, thus

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of this text, see James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, pp. 489–90 with references.

making the body an arena for a cosmic struggle. The end and goal of this process is the resurrection of the body, as depicted in 1 Cor. 15. This process of transformation brings an end to the earthly body, replacing it with a different kind of bodily existence; i.e. heavenly bodies. From his analogies in 1 Cor. 15:36–41, Paul deduces that bodies are appropriate to the world in which they belong. The nature of the resurrected body is, therefore, defined in terms of heavenly embodiments (1 Cor. 15:48–50). The resurrected body does not consist of the perishable σάρξ or σῶμα, but of a body appropriate to the world of the Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Paul thus thinks of the body in terms both of an earthly identity that is perishable, and a heavenly identity that is inner and spiritual, and thus less visible, but which will transform the whole body to become like Christ's glorious body.

In short, then, what is Paul's view of the body? Owing to theological controversies in which he became embroiled about the identity of his converts, the body ranked high on Paul's theological agenda. It is by no means a matter of indifference. Matters of body and lifestyle distinguished believers from their past pagan life. Thus the body became a sign of distinction to Paul. Most characteristically he employs this in speaking of the body as the dwelling of the Spirit. From this concept most of his sayings relevant to the body can be derived. In conceiving of the Christians' body as God's temple, Paul reminds them of God's lordship and presence in their life. They share in Christ's glorious body, which will be enjoyed in full at the resurrection and which provides an appropriate heavenly body. In their present life, believers are preparing themselves for this full transformation. This preparation takes place in service and ministry, which in the end consumes the body; thus suffering and impending death serve the process of transformation. In this process there is a constant danger of polluting the holy body by returning to the lifestyle of the past and by caring for the body in a way which stimulates defiling desires to take control. Paul seems to be more concerned to stress the dangers lurking in the needs of the body, particularly sex,<sup>49</sup> than to

<sup>48</sup> For the resurrected body see Eduard Schweizer, 'σῶμα', pp. 1060–2; Edvin Larsson, *Christus als Vorbild*, pp. 3037–323; Dale B. Martin, *Corinthian Body*, pp. 123–9.

<sup>49</sup> Dale B. Martin, 'Paul without Passion', argues that the apostle nowhere mentions a positive kind of desire as being fulfilled in marriage. Martin claims that Paul urged married couples to have sexual intercourse 'in the absence of sexual passion and desire' (p. 202). Marriage was to Paul a tool or means of guarding against desire (p. 207). That Paul urges Christian men to find wives not in the passion of desire (1 Thess. 4:5) does not necessarily mean that sex should be practised without any affection when married (cf. Martin's *Corinthian Body*, pp. 206, 209). According to 1 Cor. 7:5 sex in marriage is seen as a cure for desire. But how can it be so, if it is practised devoid of any affection? Somehow



repeat his Jewish theology of creation.<sup>50</sup> The question of food and hence the stomach do not receive that much attention. But as we will see later in this study, sex and food are not to be entirely separated.

It is my conviction that Paul's dicta on belly-worship are not sufficiently accounted for by labelling them a rhetoric of vilification. I expect them somehow to be related to Paul's thoughts on the believer's body. This expectation is, of course, in need of substantiation. As we now proceed, and particularly when we address the Pauline texts, we will constantly keep this broader framework in mind: Do belly-worship and body in any way relate?

Paul considered and even accepted (not very enthusiastically though) that the power of sexual love, which easily slid into temptation of dangerous desire, met some satisfaction in marital sex. Martin's argument leaves Paul's logic void on this point. Marriage is to Paul clearly a subsidiary option, but it brings a satisfaction which makes adultery appear unnecessary. In this way it is a prophylaxis against adultery. I think Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 55 is correct in saying 'By this essentially negative, even alarmist, strategy, Paul left a fatal legacy to future ages.' Eph. 5 as well as the Pastoral Epistles, which both belong in a wider Pauline tradition, would, of course, balance this picture of 1 Cor. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Exceptions are e.g. Phil. 4:11–12, where both want and abundance are seen as blessings of God, and 1 Cor. 10:26, 30.